



STATE OF WISCONSIN

Division of Hearings and Appeals

In the Matter of

Rock County Human Services, Petitioner

vs.

██████████, Respondent

DECISION

Case #: FOF - 206211

Pursuant to petition filed September 9, 2022, under Wis. Admin. Code §HA 3.03, and 7 C.F.R. § 273.16, to review a decision by the Rock County Human Services to disqualify ██████████ from receiving FoodShare benefits (FS) for a period of one year, a telephonic hearing was held on Wednesday, December 14, 2022, originating from Madison, Wisconsin.

The issue for determination is whether the respondent committed an Intentional Program Violation (IPV).

There appeared at that time the following persons:

PARTIES IN INTEREST:

Petitioner:

Rock County Human Services
1900 Center Avenue
Janesville, WI 53546

Respondent:

██████████

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE:

Peter McCombs
Division of Hearings and Appeals

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The respondent (CARES # [REDACTED]) is a resident of Rock County who received FS benefits in Rock County from at least June 1, 2019 through July 31, 2019.
2. The respondent was employed by [REDACTED] from December 27, 2018 through June 18, 2019; his last paycheck was received on or about July 22, 2019.
3. The respondent completed a Six Month Report form on May 6, 2019, reporting employment with [REDACTED]. The respondent's [REDACTED] employment was not reported.
4. The respondent worked as a welder at [REDACTED], and recalls that there were times that he was laid off from [REDACTED].
5. On November 15, 2022, the petitioner prepared an Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice alleging that the respondent failed to report his [REDACTED] employment on his May 2019, Six-Month Report form.

DISCUSSION

An intentional program violation of the FoodShare program occurs when a recipient intentionally does the following:

1. makes a false or misleading statement, or misrepresents, conceals or withholds facts;
or
2. commits any act that constitutes a violation of the Food Stamp Act, the Food Stamp Program Regulations, or any Wisconsin statute for the purpose of using, presenting, transferring, acquiring, receiving, possessing or trafficking of FoodShare benefits or QUEST cards.

FoodShare Wisconsin Handbook, § 3.14.1; *see also* 7 C.F.R. § 273.16(c) and Wis. Stat. §§ 946.92(2).

An intentional program violation can be proven by a court order, a diversion agreement entered into with the local district attorney, a waiver of a right to a hearing, or an administrative disqualification hearing, *FoodShare Wisconsin Handbook*, § 3.14.1. The petitioner can disqualify only the individual found to have committed the intentional violation; it cannot disqualify the entire household. Those disqualified on grounds involving the improper transfer of FS benefits are ineligible to participate in the FoodShare program for one year for the first violation, two years for the second violation, and permanently for the third violation. Although other family members cannot be disqualified, their monthly allotments will be reduced unless they agree to make restitution within 30 days of the date that the FS program mails a written demand letter. 7 C.F.R. § 273.16(b).

In order for the petitioner to establish that an FS recipient has committed an IPV, it has the burden to prove two separate elements by clear and convincing evidence. The recipient must have: 1) committed; and 2) intended to commit a program violation per 7 C.F.R. § 273.16(e)(6). In *Kuehn v. Kuehn*, 11 Wis.2d 15 (1959), the court held that:

Defined in terms of quantity of proof, reasonable certitude or reasonable certainty in ordinary civil cases may be attained by or be based on a mere or fair preponderance of the evidence. Such certainty need not necessarily exclude the probability that the contrary conclusion may be true. In fraud cases it has been stated the preponderance of the evidence should be clear and satisfactory to indicate or sustain a greater degree of certitude. Such degree of certitude has also been defined as being produced by clear, satisfactory, and convincing evidence. Such evidence, however, need not eliminate a reasonable doubt that the alternative or opposite conclusion may be true. ...

Kuehn, 11 Wis.2d at 26.

Wisconsin Jury Instruction – Civil 205 is also instructive. It provides:

Clear, satisfactory and convincing evidence is evidence which when weighed against that opposed to it clearly has more convincing power. It is evidence which satisfies and convinces you that “yes” should be the answer because of its greater weight and clear convincing power. “Reasonable certainty” means that you are persuaded based upon a rational consideration of the evidence. Absolute certainty is not required, but a guess is not enough to meet the burden of proof. This burden of proof is known as the “middle burden.” The evidence required to meet this burden of proof must be more convincing than merely the greater weight of the credible evidence but may be less than beyond a reasonable doubt.

Further, the *McCormick* treatise states that “it has been persuasively suggested that [the clear and convincing evidence standard of proof] could be more simply and intelligibly translated to the jury if they were instructed that they must be persuaded that the truth of the contention is highly probable.” 2 *McCormick on Evidence* § 340 (John W. Strong gen. ed., 4th ed. 1992).

Thus, in order to find that an IPV was committed, the trier of fact must derive from the evidence a firm conviction as to the existence of each of the two elements even though there may be a reasonable doubt as to their existence.

In order to prove the second element, i.e., intention, there must be clear and convincing evidence that the FS recipient intended to commit the IPV. The question of intent is generally one to be determined by the trier of fact. *State v. Lossman*, 118 Wis.2d 526 (1984). There is a general rule that a person is presumed to know and intend the probable and natural consequences of his or her own voluntary words or acts. *See, John F. Jelke Co. v. Beck*, 208 Wis. 650 (1932); 31A C.J.S. Evidence §131. Intention is a subjective state of mind to be determined upon all the facts. *Lecus v. American Mut. Ins. Co. of Boston*, 81 Wis.2d 183 (1977). Thus, there must be clear and convincing evidence that the FS recipient knew that the act or omission was a violation of the FS Program but committed the violation anyway.

At hearing, the petitioner established that the respondent’s Fab-Master income was not timely reported, and was not included in his May 2019 Six Month Report form. The respondent countered that trying to recall what was transpiring in May of 2019 is difficult, but that he does recall periods of time where he was laid off by ██████████ during the six months that he was employed there. He further noted that it was never his intention to mislead the agency regarding his income.

While this is a very close case, I find that the respondent has successfully rebutted the agency’s assertion of an IPV. The agency has the burden of establishing not only a violation of FS rules/regulations, but also that the violation was intentional. The respondent has credibly asserted that he was laid off at times from ██████████, and it is possible that such a layoff could have occurred at the time of his May 2019 Six Month Report form submission. I note that the case comments submitted by the agency are replete with contacts by the respondent and regular updates regarding his various places of employment, unemployment and receipt of unemployment benefits. Furthermore, the Employer Verification received from ██████████ reveals an almost \$1,000 difference between ██████████ income paid to the respondent in April and May, which could corroborate the respondent’s contention that he may have been laid off when submitting his May 6, 2019 Six Month Report form.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

For the reasons discussed above, there is no clear and convincing evidence that the respondent intended to commit an IPV.

NOW, THEREFORE, it is ORDERED

That the petitioner's determination of an intentional program violation is reversed, and the petition for review is hereby dismissed.

REQUEST FOR A REHEARING ON GROUNDS OF GOOD CAUSE FOR FAILURE TO APPEAR

In instances where the good cause for failure to appear is based upon a showing of non-receipt of the hearing notice, the respondent has 30 days after the date of the written notice of the hearing decision to claim good cause for failure to appear. See 7 C.F.R. sec. 273.16(e)(4). Such a claim should be made in writing to the Division of Hearings and Appeals, P.O. Box 7875, Madison, WI 53707-7875.

APPEAL TO COURT

You may also appeal this decision to Circuit Court in the county where you live. Appeals must be filed with the Court **and** served either personally or by certified mail on the Secretary of the Department of Health Services, 1 West Wilson Street, Room 651, Madison, WI 53703, **and** on those identified in this decision as "PARTIES IN INTEREST" **no more than 30 days after the date of this decision** or 30 days after a denial of a timely rehearing request (if you request one).

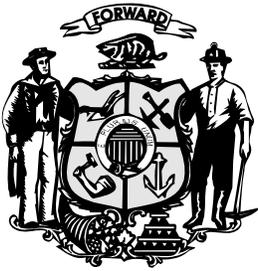
The process for Circuit Court Appeals may be found at Wis. Stat. §§ 227.52 and 227.53. A copy of the statutes may be found online or at your local library or courthouse.

Given under my hand at the City of Madison,
Wisconsin, this 20th day of January, 2023



\sPeter McCombs
Administrative Law Judge
Division of Hearings and Appeals

- c: Southern Consortium - email
- Public Assistance Collection Unit - email
- Division of Health Care Access and Accountability - email
- Mary Donahue - email
- Laura Middleton - email



State of Wisconsin\DIVISION OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS

Brian Hayes, Administrator
5th Floor North
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Madison, WI 53705-5400

Telephone: (608) 266-3096
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The preceding decision was sent to the following parties on January 20, 2023.

Rock Cty Human Services
Public Assistance Collection Unit
Division of Health Care Access and Accountability

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]